

Town of Topsfield
Town Hall Building Committee Report
To Board of Selectmen
November 19, 2007

Respectfully Submitted,

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Executive Summary

On June 11, 2007, the Board of Selectmen voted to adopt the Town Hall Building Committee's charter directing the committee to:

- Analyze current, and plan for future functional needs of Town Departments
- Address accessibility and compliance needs for Town Hall
- Revisit and consider cost-effective alternatives to renovation that may achieve goals of needs analysis
- Develop community outreach program to communicate necessity for improving infrastructure of Town Hall; this program may include reference to alternatives considered
- Estimate costs and coordinate request for funding from (Special) Town Meeting with Board of Selectmen

Four subcommittees were formed to provide analysis to several issues: Department Needs Analysis, Common Space Needs, Personnel Relocation, and Community Outreach. The findings of each committee to date are included at the end of this summary. The committee has met monthly to review and discuss subcommittee findings.

Findings During Analysis Phase

During the subcommittees' analysis it became apparent that the facility is in need of urgent attention and we are recommending an independent, comprehensive building inspection. The Town Hall Building Committee concludes that the following items are of highest priority and drive the need for immediate action:

- 1) Perform an air/environmental quality test regarding lead, asbestos and mold concerns
- 2) Perform an energy audit for a plan of action to remedy inefficient heating and cooling
- 3) Renovate the secondary egress from the second floor to achieve building code compliance
- 4) Improve data security and storage of town records
- 5) Bring building entries, doorway widths, thresholds, and hardware within American Disabilities Act compliance (our current ramp may qualify for waiver)
- 6) Correct foundation leaks, ground water seepage through concrete floor
- 7) Upgrade insufficient electrical outlets
- 8) Upgrade insufficient 2nd floor lighting
- 9) Provide elevator for multi-floor access
- 10) Improve telecommunications system

Depending on the results of testing, audit and inspection, we may have significant costs for HVAC, environmental, and electrical improvements. The costs associated with ADA compliance

are estimated at \$900,000. When you consider the potential of these cumulative costs, along with the functional needs of our town government, a long term solution may be more cost effective.

Long Term Options

The selectmen are presented three viable options:

- 1) Gut and fully renovate the town hall facility (\$2.7 to \$5.0 million total)
 - Contract for architectural design and renovate facility (\$2.5 to \$4.2 million)
 - Relocate town services temporarily (\$.2 to .8 million)
- 2) Relocate permanently to an existing facility (\$3.5 million)
 - Contract for services to determine feasibility of adaptive reuse of the current building by the public or private sector
 - Survey the community's interest in the preservation of town hall as town-owned property
 - Purchase building and modify for town needs (improvement costs not included above)
- 3) Relocate permanently to new construction (\$2.9 to \$4.6 million total)
 - Contract for services with GLC Development Resources to determine feasibility of adaptive reuse by the public or private sector
 - Survey the community's interest in the preservation of town hall as town-owned property
 - Purchase suitable real estate (\$.5 million)
 - Contract for architectural design and build facility (\$2.4 to \$4.1 million)

Each option will incur annual maintenance costs and should be reviewed as part of the decision-making process.

Subcommittee Activity to Date

1. Department Needs Analysis Subcommittee

Throughout the summer of 2007, the Department Needs Analysis subcommittee developed surveys, conducted focus groups and held a series of interviews with Town Hall employees to identify their needs, and the needs of town government. The attached Department Needs Analysis report concludes that the existing footprint can accommodate the estimated square footage with significant structural and engineering modifications, including the conversion of the Great Hall to useable office and meeting space. An architect will identify how best to meet the town's current and future needs regarding layout, priorities and cost effectiveness.

2. Common Space Needs

Many of the subcommittee's findings are summarized in the section of this executive summary entitled "Findings During Analysis Phase", and were reported during pre-2007 Town Hall Building Committee efforts.

Subcommittee member Peter Bryson, a building code consultant, reported in a 11/12/06 memo (APPENDIX A) that the existing handicap ramp may be eligible for a variance if it was compliant when built in 1985. This review of 1985 building codes has not been completed. It can also be reported that Chapter 34 of the Mass Building Code allows historic structures to be brought closer to compliance with building codes without meeting the requirements for new construction. The data storage analysis will require extensive further study.

Ted Galante completed an ADA Compliance Report, as part of the Architectural Barriers Removal grant application in 2004. In a letter to the Director of the Department of Housing and Community Development dated 12/22/03, Mr. Galante summarized the alternatives that were considered to achieve ADA Compliance at that time. A copy of Mr. Galante's letter is appended to this report (APPENDIX B), as the current committee is revisiting these alternatives. At this time, a suitable location for siting a new Town Hall has not been identified.

3. Personnel Relocation Subcommittee

With the information available as of November 2007, Topsfield does not own a suitable alternative location to temporarily or permanently relocate Town Hall. The subcommittee estimated that approximately 6,000 square feet of functional office space would be necessary for temporary relocation (for approximately 27 months), commencing no sooner than the fall of 2009.

The subcommittee determined the best option to be to leasing privately owned space, currently available at \$12 per square foot (\$187,000) not including minor improvements to meet needs. Given the uncertainty of available lease space when needed, another option is to rent portable office units installed on town-owned properties (\$588,000 - \$735,000). The subcommittee also identified several properties for sale in town and reviewed their potential for temporary or permanent relocation. (\$695,000 - \$3.5 million) Purchasing is inadvisable unless the Town acquires space as part of a comprehensive Master Facilities Plan, to serve a future Town purpose other than temporary office space.

4. Outreach Subcommittee

The committee has begun the preparation of Question and Answer format worksheets for distribution. The work in progress is attached. In addition, newspaper releases for articles and letters to the editor have been published in the local papers. Until the Board of Selectmen decide on a plan for town hall, the committee can go no further.

Conclusions

Topsfield should no longer defer investment in its town government facility. The Town Hall Building Committee concludes that:

- Short-term repairs as defined may exceed 40% of the cost of new construction or renovation
- Making required repairs can be done but will not address the functionality and efficiency needs of our town government
- Hiring a consultant for firmer project estimates would be appropriate
- Construction of a new facility may cost less than renovation of the current Town Hall
- A suitable site for permanent relocation has not been identified and land costs associated with this project by itself, rather than part of a master facilities plan, may erode savings associated with the cost of new construction
- The current building has value as part of Topsfield's heritage; hiring a consultant to determine the feasibility of adaptive private or public reuse would be appropriate to help the community develop a consensus on the direction of our investment